

Heavy reinforcements

The addition of 38 concrete buoy sinkers will bolster the Axel Carlson Reef off Point Pleasant Beach, benefiting marine life, anglers and scuba divers.

By TODD B. BATES
ENVIRONMENTAL WRITER

They're very smooth, weigh up to 4 tons apiece and will serve as fine destinations for drift fishermen to catch fish, according to state officials.

A total of 38 concrete buoy sinkers are to be dropped this month and next at the Axel Carlson Reef, which is about 4.4 nautical miles southeast of Manasquan Inlet, according to the state Department of Environmental Protection.

"I think it's a great idea," said Capt. Bill Egarter of the Dairylea, an 81-foot party fishing boat docked in Point Pleasant Beach.

"I fish the southeast end of the reef a lot," said Egarter, 60, of Point Pleasant Beach. "There's a lot of stuff out there already, but this would even help enhance it."

The Axel Carlson Reef, named about 14 years ago after a former Monmouth County fireholder who was an avid fisherman, will receive an estimated 100 tons of worn concrete buoy sinkers from the U.S. Coast Guard.

It is one of the numerous reef projects in recent years under the DEP Division of Fish and Wildlife's Artificial Reef Program, which has created 15 artificial reef sites.

The program's intent is to enhance a small percentage of the sea floor — less than 1 percent — to benefit 153 species of marine life that prefer habitat with structure, according to the 2006 edition of "NJ Reef News," which is on the DEP Web site.

The Coast Guard sinkers would be the first of their kind at New Jersey's reefs, according to Hugh Carberry, DEP reef coordinator.

His goal is to create a drift fishing area in the southeast area of the Axel Carlson Reef for fishermen who are targeting flounder and sea bass, he said.

The first sinkers were dropped last month, Carberry said.

"These are great structures to put on the sea floor," he said.

If the goal is to create a drift fishing area, "you want concrete that's relatively smooth so (anglers) can drift over the top of it without getting caught" on it, Carberry said.

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U.S. Coast Guard workers, aboard the cutter Katherine Walker, lower a concrete buoy sinker onto the Axel Carlson Reef, about 4.4 nautical miles southeast of Manasquan Inlet. ALL STAFFWORK BY ENVIRONMENTAL WRITER

In 1992, former Gov. James J. Florio signed a bill that named the then-proposed artificial reef in memory of Axel B. "Junie" Carlson Jr., who had died that year, according to a 1992 news release.

In recent years, the overall reef has grown from bare sand to more than 280 smaller reefs for use by anglers and divers, according to Reef News.

The site's "rapid development ... is largely due to the generous donations of many sports clubs, organizations and individuals who paid the costs of preparing and delivering reef materials to the site," the publication says.

The Coast Guard sinkers will provide a fine surface for mussels, barnacles, hydroids, anemones, stony coral and other invertebrates to attach to, according to the DEP Web site.

These creatures will quickly cover the sinkers with a "living carpet, providing the base of a productive marine food chain," the Web site says.

By this summer, sea bass, tautog, scup, triggerfish and summer flounder will colonize the new reef, the Web site says.

"It's a great endeavor," said Capt. Peter Grimbilas of the 46-foot G-Force, a charter fishing boat docked in Point Pleasant Beach.

The project is "a plus for fishermen and divers," Grimbilas said. "It's only going to attract ... a tremendous amount of fish."

The approximately

30-member Greater Point Pleasant Charter Boat Association has used its Mako Mania shark-fishing tournament to raise money to add boats and other materials to the Axel Carlson Reef, he said.

All told, the association and other entities have probably raised more than \$400,000 since 1995 — largely through the mako tournament — for Axel Carlson Reef projects, said Grimbilas, who heads the association's reef-building committee.



3. Coast Guard workers, aboard the cutter Katherine Walker, get ready to deploy a concrete buoy sinker at the Axel Carlson Reef. (PHOTO: U.S. DEPARTMENT OF ENVIRONMENTAL PROTECTION)

The reef, which covers 4 square miles, is about 2 miles off the beach in the Point Pleasant Beach area, according to Carberry.

It is in water that is 66 to 80 feet deep, he said.

The Coast Guard is "still coming up with sinkers, and they're all different sizes," Carberry said.

They are stockpiled in two places in the New York Harbor area, and two Coast Guard ships will deploy them, he said.

The sinkers range from 5,000 to 12,500 pounds apiece, the DEP Web site says. The largest ones are about 4 feet by 4 feet and 3 feet high, Carberry said.

The sinker project should be completed by the end of February, said Carberry, adding that the ships won't go out to sea if waves are higher than 3 to 4 feet, he said.

Once the project is complete, the DEP will release the coordinates of each sinker to the public, he said.

"It's a great program the state has put together, and I hope it continues," Grimbilas said.

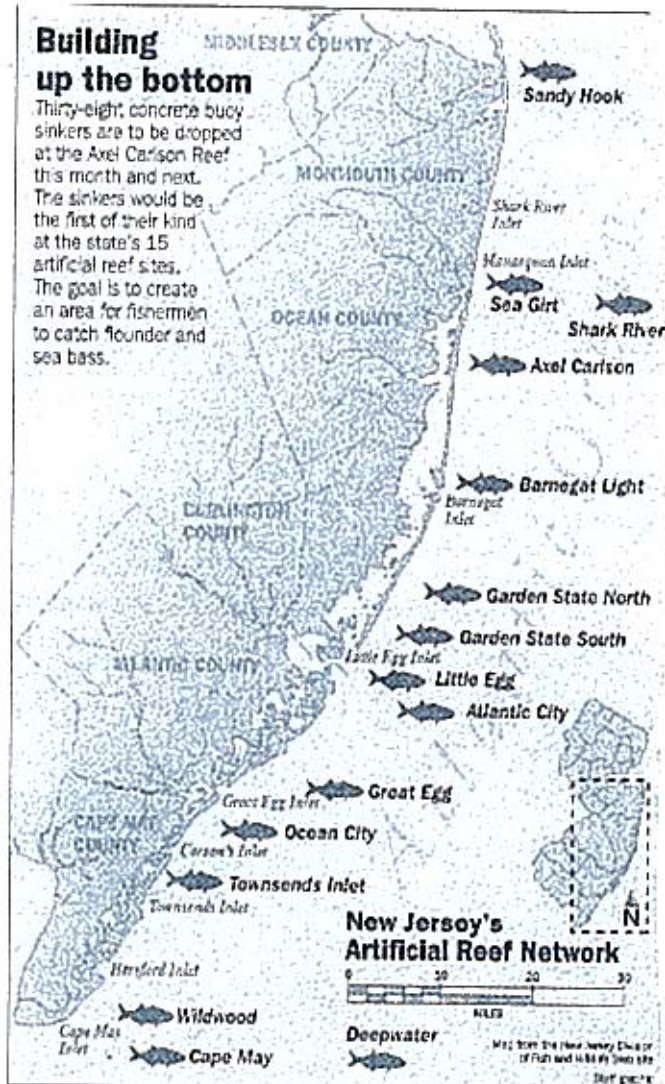
We "need a whole lot of support from recreational people

... as well as government facilities to fill these (reefs) up," he said.

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Building up the bottom

Thirty-eight concrete buoy sinkers are to be dropped at the Axel Carlson Reef this month and next. The sinkers would be the first of their kind at the state's 15 artificial reef sites. The goal is to create an area for fishermen to catch flounder and sea bass.



Reef buildup to benefit marine life, anglers